

Info Sheet 2

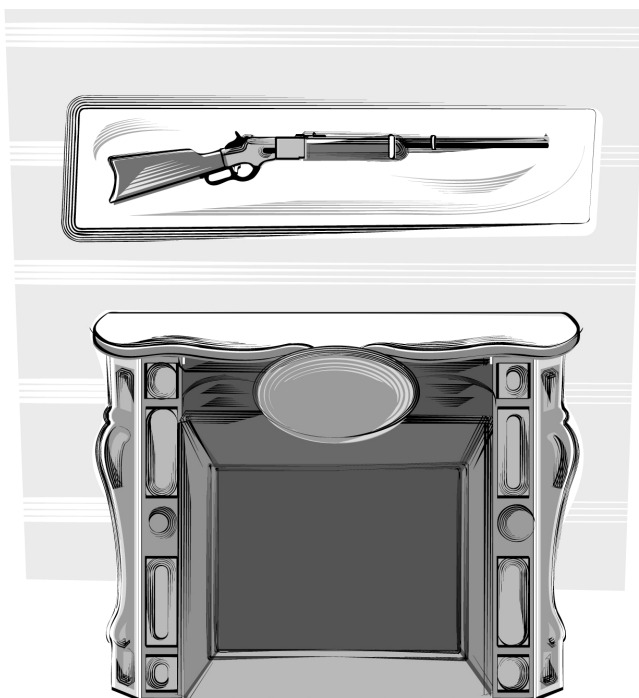
Excerpts from “Why Social Security?” (1937)

Theme 2: Taxes in U.S. History
Lesson 4: The Social Security Act of 1935

The following is an excerpt from the pamphlet “Why Social Security,” published in 1937. Do you think the writer supports or opposes Social Security?

The musket hung over the fireplace once stood for security in American homes. It meant game for the pot. It gave protection against unfriendly beasts and Indians. It was a first defense against hunger and danger in the new land.

Probably no families in the world ever have been as self-reliant as the Americans who wielded their muskets in the Colonies and on the frontier. They literally made their own living, for a family had little or nothing except what their members could do and make. A large family was an advantage, since then there were many hands to plant and weed and harvest, to chop wood, to carpenter, to spin and dye and weave, cook and sew.



Family Security and Social Security

The words “social security” have become popular in the last five or ten years. Actually the right and duty of a community to protect its members is as old as the records of men. Primitive tribes have rules and customs to assure the safety of all.

Even pioneer American families, of course, relied on each other for help in trouble and emergencies. Barn-raising and corn-huskings, which have lasted down to our times, are a survival of years when a household asked the neighbors’ help in an emergency, knowing it would give its help when its turn came.

The Social Security Act of 1935

The Social Security Act of 1935 grows out of these many changes in American life. It consolidates our past experience in meeting insecurity. It also sets up a bulwark against some of the newer kinds of insecurity that threaten large numbers of us in this twentieth century.

Several parts of the Social Security Act deal with groups of people whose troubles we have recognized for many years. These provisions consider the people who are too young or too old to earn or are physically handicapped. The act authorizes Federal grants-in-aid to enable the States to broaden and extend regular allowances for needy mothers, the needy blind, and the needy aged. It authorizes grants-in-aid for State services for child welfare, for crippled children, and for physically handicapped people who can be helped to work again. The provisions for child welfare apply especially to rural areas.

These sections of the Social Security Act draw on our national resources to help all States to do better what most or all have undertaken in some way and to some degree. They give a way to put into effect the best measures we have been able to devise for helping people who are unable to help themselves.

The act thus helps States to find ways in which workers and employers can steady livelihood. It also provides ways to build up the livelihood of wage earners in old age.